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To
K. R. and E. S. T.

THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY.

THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

A Poem.

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PREFACE.

THIS Poem is selected for separate and anonymous publication, because it is concerned with a class of feelings which scarcely admit of being expressed freely and honestly without concealment of authorship. It was composed at a time of life when such feelings are apt to be most intense, and in view of this consideration, it is now published by the author as it was originally written.

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THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY.

The More Excellent Way.

I.

I.

I JOURNEYED on a lonely moor alone,
And saw the sun arise, and fall, and set,
Upon a wilderness of heath and stone,
That spread away to hills, which rose and met
The mountains, rising still to meet the wet
And falling skies of autumn, there to stand
Their shoulders 'neath the heavy clouds, that let
The sheeted light-rays glimmer on the land,
Like blessings pointing straight from some almighty hand.

II.

In barren strength and grey with age untold,
The mountain-brothers frowned on all below,
And, linked in hoary arms, seemed to behold,
With rugged faces ranged in giant row,
A world on which their frown could but bestow
The curse of their own barrenness—an earth
Where even briar and thistle dare not grow,
But all was doomed to a perpetual dearth
More dread than Sin smote on the face of Nature's birth.

III.

"And here," methought, "is Nature worn by years,
As showing in her life the lot of all
Her offspring; on her furrowed face the tears
That forth distilling from the cloud-lands fall,
Through rocky eyelids, motionless and tall,
To trickle down those rugged cheeks of woe,
And mingle with the ocean's sighing call—
They tell of silent sorrow's ceaseless flow,
And mystery of things that ages fail to show."

IV.

Alone I watched the dimly weeping scene,
Alone I marked the ravage time had wrought,
Alone I saw that face in grief serene,
Deep wrinkled with its centuries of thought:
I turned upon the world within, and sought
To gaze upon the landscape of the mind;
Amid the shadows with which it was fraught,
I faintly hoped some blended lights to find:
And thus my thoughts as through the hills my footsteps wind.

V.

"Oh mystery of mysteries: all, all
Is mystery. Ye mountains crowned with snow,
Ye clouds that roll, ye mists that rise and fall,
Ye streams that rush, ye winds that tireless blow,
Ye arching skies that bend o'er all below,
And thou, O sun, that blazest forth on high,
Whence came ye here, and whither will ye go?
How came ye here? What are ye all? And why?
I stand among you all, and all is mystery.

VI.

"And I who am within your mystery
Am to myself a mystery as vast;
I know I am, as I see you to be.
But know not whence I am from out the past,
Nor where I shall be when cold death shall cast
Me to the future; how, and what, and why
I am, I know not: but my first and last
Of knowledge is the knowledge of a sigh—
'I am that I am:' all the rest is mystery.

VII.

"For wings of thought my spirit spread to soar
Into the sphere of things, and sought to find—
Beyond the clouds and stars of heaven's floor,
Beyond the ages that are left behind,
Beyond the ken of sense-imprisoned mind—
Some place to rest; but void infinity
Was all she found, eternal, voiceless, blind;
Then sank, and breathed forth one despairing cry—
'Thou art the Alpha and Omega—Mystery.'

VIII.

"And what those wings in their brief flights now find,
Ye all in your eternal ages found,
For when I ask you 'What was there behind
The veil ere suns were centred, or the round
New worlds were born, ere tablets of the ground
Began their record of what earth has seen?'
Your answer comes,—that awful look, profound
As all your ages, tells me what ye mean,—
'The mystery that is, and was, has always been.'

IX.

"I see the lines first stamped in zealous youth,
When moving ardour in your bosoms boiled,
And seethed, and fused, and flamed to know the truth,
When wak'ning to the mystery encoiled
Around your life, ye fought with all that foiled
Your efforts to be free,—up-reaching fire,
And hurling floods, in earthquake throes ye toiled,
Till, baffled in your deepest, best desire,
Ye sank before th' Eternal dumbly to admire.

X.

"So let me sink, the insect of an hour,
So let me stifle my tumultuous mind;
What am I better than this heath-blown flower
Here blooming 'mid the millions of its kind?
And if to no existence is defined
The meaning of existence or the goal,
Should I, an hourling, fatuously blind,
Aspire to satisfy my yearning soul,
Or think to grasp at once the meaning of the whole?

XI.

"Should I, a little spark of flickering mind,
Presume in strength like yonder sun to blaze,
The night of chaos with my light to blind,
And burn primæval darkness with my rays;
When all the light of all the countless days
Since intellect first dawned upon the deep,
Has only served to show to human gaze
The darkness of an all-enfolding sleep,
Through which a glimmering dream may sometimes seem to sweep?

XII.

"Aspiring ocean, restless, spreads her hope,
Upcurling warm through heaven's dome to roll,
Like living arms that with their vapours grope
To find in airy space some solid goal,
The search for which strange yearnings teach her soul;
But all her hopes rain back into her breast,
Condensed by cold that spreads from pole to pole,
And she is left to sigh in her unrest,
With her own bosom as the goal of all her quest.

XIII.

"So let me cease to grope or ponder more;
A peace bestills the Ocean of my Thought;
Its billows sink to ripples on the shore;
For Resignation's brooding calm has taught
That all its wild commotion comes to nought;
And, as I gaze upon its tranquil breast,
Do I not feel that all its waves are brought
Within the shadow of that solemn rest
Which centuries of sorrow show to be the best?

XIV.

"Ah! how can such a calm endure? Again
The tempest life will move, and rage, and lash
To flying foam the torture-maddened main;
The waves will roar, and on their confines dash
With rearing might o'er continents to wash:
The ancient cliffs will then withstand the shock,
And billows backward fall with tumbling crash,
From mysteries that all their madness mock
With flinty smiles upon the face of shining rock.

XV.

"I know the helplessness, but also know
The dire necessity; I live, and mind
Is doomed to chafing as the waves to flow:
Though it may be but rocky coasts to find,
Which all the life of thought with firmness bind,
That life must rise, and seethe, and yearn, and boil;
It cannot stand as these colossal, blind
And life-like, lifeless hills, e'en though its toil
Should end as ends the ocean foam upon the soil.

XVI.

"For O, the yearning, deep, intense, and strong,
To drink of living waters in their course,
To raise with heart and voice the thankful song,
And know that Thou of all things art the source;
That 'tis with true and sympathetic force
The instincts of my nature point to Thee,
That Thou art God, and I without remorse
May feel the life of thought to move in me;
That 'tis a blest, and not a monstrous thing, to be.

XVII.

"'Tis well in dreams to give the mountains life,
To see in rain and rill the sign of tears,
To fancy in all nature thoughts at strife
With mysteries too vast for all her years;
But dreams and fancies quell not facts and fears,
And here, within this prospect vastly grand,
Of all my throbbing brain or sees or hears,
'Tis I alone who cry to understand,
Yet cry as cries an infant wrecked on lonely strand.

XVIII.

"Ye waves that curling move towards that form,
Ye scudding clouds that scowl upon the deep,
Ye wrestling winds that animate the storm,
Ye moon and stars that coldly onwards sweep,
Have ye no tear for that lone child to weep?
No pity for that all-heartrending cry?
Behold ye not those little limbs that creep?
Nor see the dimming anguish of that eye,
Which closing, opening, dying, stares upon the sky?

XIX.

"Ye have no heart, no pity, no remorse,
No mercy to be sought, no help to crave;
The child is dead; and ye work on your course
As blindly as before, though one small wave
Of all your millions might have deigned to lave
The infant to its mother's nursling care—
Its life from death, her life from worse to save;
Yet all your work but raised a sand-bank there,
While that fond mother wrung her frenzied hands in prayer.

xx.

"Then why should I, O soulless, mindless things,
Appeal to you for sympathy or light,
Endow you with the feelings manhood brings,
Or seek to fill your stony eyes with sight?
I am alone, and must accept my right
To stand alone; to gaze on all the frame
Of things—look down the depth, up-scan the height,
Cry, faint, revive the light of reason's flame,
To see I am alone, and all things still the same."

II.

I.

"FAR down the valley, in a tortured course,
A torrent, grappling with the naked blocks,
Sends up a roar continuous and hoarse,
As of some savage strength chained to the rocks;
Above, the unsubstantial mist, which locks
Embracing arms around the mountain-sides,
Seems like a shape unnatural, that mocks
At distance, as its spreading form divides,
And, noiselessly as swiftly, o'er the moorland glides.

II.

"Approaching now behold thrust out a hand,
Suspended high above my head in air,
Its fingers crooked as if to seize the land,
Or catch me up into its misty lair;
Downwards it swoops, as if a spirit there,
Determined in his purpose, would upraise
Me to the clouds, or waft me to the fair
Cerulean skies, where far in childhood's days
I heard the angel host uplift their psalm of praise.

III.

"But, sweeping on amid the wintry blast,
It folds me, earth-bound, in a world of white,
Where all is motion, coming, going, past,
As though a multitude in gleaming light
Were rushing wildly, undefined by sight,
Yet living, rushing, flying o'er the ground,
Like hill-born ghosts, mysteriously bright:
On, on, they glide, without one passing sound,
And fill with airy substance all the scene around.

IV.

"'Tis past, 'tis gone, careering o'er the vale;
But lo, its parting there reveals on high,
Through that last flowing shred of garment pale,
Yon darkly grand, yon huge immensity,
Which, cloud-pavilioned, rolls along the sky,
And rests its pillars on the mountain row;
Firm pedestaled on strength that lasts for aye,
Great buttresses out-bulge with motion slow,
And root the cloud-cathedral on the earth below.

V.

"Each massive tower, crowned by lofty spire,
Up-rears to Heaven its majestic head,
While through their substance gleams the threat'ning fire,
Which tells of growing anger, fierce and dread;
Creation, cowering beneath the tread
Of Him who makes of clouds His chariot,
Thick veils her face with darkness deep outspread,
To hide the dreadful glory of that spot:
'Be still, and know that I am God:' a sound stirs not.

VI.

"As when two armies standing face to face,
Arrayed in eager tension for the fight,
Yet motionless and silent stand a space,
Before, with massive voice, all rolling bright,
Their legions clash together in their might;
So now, the silence hanging like a pall,
Which droops on every deep and every height,
Is felt to be the breathless hush of all
That soon the very soul of nature shall appal.

VII.

"Out-leaps, with deaf'ning crash, a league of flame,
And for a moment brightness is the world;
The firmament is torn through all its frame,
While bursting thunders are on thunders hurled;
Amid the mighty clouds around them curled,
The mountains raise their voices loud and hoarse;
Each calls to each through darkness thickly furled,
Like giants struggling with a stronger force,
And answers rolling back fill all the valley's course.

VIII.

"The many lightnings flash—flash quick and strong,
Like crooked sabres clashing in the sky;
The roar of battle, loudly fierce and long,
Proclaims the raging of the war on high;
From chasm throats of vapour fearfully
There bellow forth, in fury of the fight,
The challenges that challenges defy,
And spirits, godlike in their size and might,
Are meeting face to face within the lurid light.

IX.

'The powers of Heaven are shaken tott'ringly,
The mountains move and stagger to their base:
To Thee all angels cry aloud, and cry
That in Thy mercy Thou shouldst show Thy face;
'Stretch forth Thine arm almighty o'er this place,
To save Thy new creation from the lot
That dashed its ruin through abysmal space,
When Satan fell, like lightning downwards shot,
And swept to ruin all that was and now is not.'

X.

"The prayer is heard, the muttered thunders cease,
The lightning flames are quenched by the command
Of Him who said to storm and tempest—'Peace,
Be still;' and all was calm on sea and land.
'Tis He who holds God's sceptre in His hand;
All in subjection lies beneath His feet;
He made the worlds; by Him do all things stand;
And now, enthroned supreme in Power's seat,
He rules the whole Creation, infinite, complete.

XI.

"So felt our fathers in the days of old,
When thunders spake to man the thought divine,
When lightnings were the scroll of words unrolled,
And stars with meaning in their eyes did shine:
Then all the universe was one great shrine,
Where men could hold communion deep and true,
With Him who stretched the heavens on a line,
To veil His dreadful glory from their view,
In Whom they lived and moved and all their being drew.

XII.

"Such, too, was mighty Jove to those of yore,
Whose living souls still move in all our thought—
The race of giants who have gone before,
And left to us the kingdoms that they fought;
But yet their mighty god has come to nought;
Olympus thunders to unstartled ears;
Great Zeus is dead, his fiery bolts are brought
Into our homes as slaves whom no one fears,
And mortals have out-lived the dread immortals' years.

XIII.

"Such, too, was yet another highest name,
A God above all other gods sublime;
The one God; One from age to age the same;
Almighty Father; Source of life and time,
And things unseen or seen in every clime;
Him all the space of heaven could not hold,
And though a man through its great vault could climb,
Or search the lowest deep of depths untold,
'Twould be to find Him there, eternal as of old.

XIV.

"And once upon the mountain Sinai,
He face to face with man, His creature, spoke;
Descending from His mercy-seat on high,
He touched the hills, and with volcano-smoke
They upwards blazed to meet the fire that broke
Through heaven's floor, as, down descending, lo,
The high and lofty One, Whom clouds and lightnings cloak,
Approaching joins the hills with motion slow,
And roots His sky-cathedral on the earth below.

XV.

"Now deeply buried in a thousand clouds,
And yet with flare of myriad lightnings bright,
That mountain rears a shrine where mercy shrouds
Jehovah's awful face from human sight:
A nation stands below the mountain height,
And all its legions worship while they stand;
Within the curtaining clouds there shines the light
Which burning seraphs flame o'er sky and land,
As loud their trumpet-blasts proclaim the high command.

XVI.

"Then one grey-bearded, stately, firm, and wise,
With grandeur of the grandest in his mien,
With thoughts too vast for manhood in his eyes,
And face upturned in purpose grave, serene,
Steps forth to near the world-appalling scene;
Alone he walks into the burning flame,
Alone to meet the God whom thunders screen,
Alone to meet the only God, and frame,
From uttered words, a Law in the Almighty's name.

XVII.

"Within the veil for forty days and nights
The man is lost to all the nation's eye,
Nor know we yet the thoughts, and sounds, and sights
He met within the mysteries of the sky;
But when, emerging from the mountain high,
He suddenly to all again appears,
Holding God-written words to last for aye,
His face has caught the glory of the spheres,
And shines, an emblem of God's light to all the years.

XVIII.

"That light through spreading centuries has spread,
Like morning sun o'er realms of land and sea;
It bathed the waves of time which rolling fled,
And tinted all the hills of history.
And still it shines, like daylight, far and free;
Its rays through all the structure of our thought
Are blended, as the sunbeams in a tree:
And with it all the life of man is wrought,
As with instinctive truth by generations taught.

XIX

"Then shall we say that light was falsely shed—
Some ghastly glimmer of distempered cloud,
When lifeless Nature seemed to raise the head,
And mumble sounds of words within her shroud?
Or shall we say these sounds caught up aloud
By human hearts that throbbed around the place,
Awaked the echoes of hope's voices proud,
Till men could hear fictitious words of grace,
And breathed the life of God through Nature's corpse-like face?

XX.

"So have all ages asked of History;
But she, with tearful and beseeching eyes,
Makes answer that the sights of infancy
In older recollection may arise,
Like monstrous shades in dreams and phantasies;
And as these things were spread before her view
While yet a babbling babe in form and size
She lay, tradition-cradled, with the Jew,
She cannot now narrate how far the dream is true.

XXI.

"Then History has only dreamed a dream?
Perchance. Strange dream, that in a mystic glow
Made all the universe with mind to gleam,
Saw in the dome of heaven reason's brow,
And through the stars one awful soul to grow.
Dissolve the dream, behold all reason fade;
Behind the veil no ray is left to show,
With shimmering sheen, why things that are were made,
And all creation sleeps within eternal shade.

XXII.

"Yea, if awakening time dissolves the dream,
It is to find a darkness on the deep,
The light of God—created by the beam
Of fancy—gone, with night-bestartled sleep;
To see the sphere of Knowledge onwards sweep
An all-eclipsing shadow through the sky;
The angel-bride of youthful Thought to weep,
As grown Thought slays her child of sanctity,
And makes young Science mother-nurse of Mystery.

XXIII.

"And lo, the Mystery has grown with age,
Till now she looks upon her parent Thought
With hollow eyes which curse her parentage,
And speaks in sounds terrific—'Thou hast brought
Me into life; my ghastly form were nought—
A thing uncalled from the Eternal stole—
Hadst thou not, fool, begotten me, and wrought
My monstrous parts into this frightful whole
That haunts thee with the blasting terror of thy soul.

XXIV.

"'Yea, hide thy glaring eyes—thou canst not flee,
Nor, struggling, slay me with thy desperate hand;
I am alive, and through the sky and sea,
Through life and death, and over every land,
My life is spread, like one vast shade, to brand
Thee with the curse of my paternity,
Till, with my arms thrown thousands in a strand,
Snake-like I hold thy shuddering frame to see
I am thy universe—thou hast created me.'"

III.

I.

"THE storm has cleared; a ruddy sunset glow
Steals o'er the mists that o'er the mountains steal;
The purple heath more purple seems to grow,
And all the scene to breathe with happier weal.
Oh Nature! thou art beautiful; I feel
My yearning soul mix full with thine in all
Thy moods, and now thy sweet smile makes me kneel
In spirit, worshipping: O let me fall
Before thy face; and hear me, hear me when I call.

II.

"Behold thy wandering, dimly wondering child,
And leave me not an utter castaway;
Oh seek me lying in the trackless wild,
And save, as perishing to thee I pray:
On thy fond breast my young life budding lay,
And drew its early sustenance from thee,
What time I looked into thine eyes to say
The tender love of helpless infancy,
And saw thy love shine back with fuller strength on me.

III.

"Beneath thy sheltering care I lived and grew,
Of thee I learnt to lisp the things I know—
Gave thee my childish trust, and round thee threw
Those tendrils of my life I loved to throw;
And still I am thy child, though thou dost grow
To look on my young life so sternly cold:
Oh mother, smile once more—once more to show
That sweet bright rapture of the days of old,
When thou didst wrap me in thine arms' embracing fold.

IV.

"Methinks I see that smile on all around;
The russet beauty of those hills and sky,
The purple glory of this heath-spread ground,
The fragrant moisture of thine autumn's sigh,
All, all awake the slumbering memory
Of times when all thy beauty could abound
With lavish tenderness to sorrow's cry,
Or flooded joy with joy's responding sound,
And poured thy radiant blessing all my life around.

V.

"Then why cannot I come again to thee,
To tell my trouble to thy list'ning ear,
Once more to feel that thou wilt pity me,
And soothe away my every burning tear?
What change is it, increasing year by year,
That year by year makes alien of my heart,
That severs all the bonds once held most dear,
And makes my brooding memory to start
When seeing what thou hast been and what now thou art?"

VI.

Once as I travelled far from native home
O'er continents and seas, through every clime,
It chanced that as I sought all lands to roam,
My journey lay, in happy summer-time,
Through a fair country, girt by hills sublime,
Which spread its fields and vineyards to the sun:
Throughout its breadth, as with melodious rhyme,
A river did in changing poetry run,
And all the land was like new paradise begun.

VII.

The people of that happy sunlit land
Were free and happy as the sunlight beams;
They lived an innocent and sheltered band,
Secluded from the world where sorrow teems,
Nor knew the evil that in knowledge gleams:
Theirs was the lot of primitive delight,
And all their lives were like our passing dreams,
When, in the stillness of a balmy night,
We live again upon the wings of childhood's flight.

VIII.

And as I journeyed through this paradise,
I sought the peaceful hospitality
Of a young cottager, whose honest eyes
Beheld with pride his tender first-born lie
Upon its girlish mother's breast, and cry,
And laugh, and scream, and box its tiny hands,
With all the changing moods of infancy;
And, as the mother nursed, "He understands,"
She said, "this is a stranger from far distant lands:

IX.

"He will not harm my little baby dear;
No, no, he is a friend—so great and strong—
Look at him now, and see there is no fear."
And then she sang a simple nursery song
Until the child grew fearless, and sidelong
Cast fitfully his glance as if to lend
His trust that I would not do harm or wrong:
Thus for a day our happiness did blend,
And as I passed the door I said, "May God defend."

X.

It chanced again that with the winter's blast,
I had through this same land to journey back;
But lo, a dreadful change o'er all had passed;
For hideous Famine now had left her track;
The fields were desolate, the vineyards black,
The stately river was a frozen thread,
The homesteads stood, but men and kine did lack,
For all was filled with dying or with dead;
The place was one great grave, where only worms were fed.

XI.

How sick'ning was the spectacle I saw!
And famished corpses, ghastly, stark, and lean,
Lay round with faces on which death did draw
The features, rotting hideously green,
To smiles, which seemed to mock the dismal scene;
Their filmy eyes appeared to stare at me,
And some to glitter with a frightful sheen;
While all was silent, save a leafless tree,
Which in the wintry wind sang dirges mournfully.

XII.

Methought I would to yonder cottage hie
Where I had stayed in happy summer time;
I had some bread; perhaps they need not die.
And as I went I saw the marks of crime;
Here was the corpse of one, who in the prime
Of youth had murdered, with that blackened knife,
These women, mixing now with his their slime;
And there two bodies locked in dying strife;
And here a girl who made those children's flesh her life.

XIII.

At last, through such, I to the cottage came,
And pushed with eager hand the ready door:
Within I found all things were still the same,
Save life and greeting that should be no more;
For my poor friend, bolt upright, sat before
A couch where lay his girlish wife—both dead:
Their faces still a loving anguish wore,
As each on each their eyes, like solid lead,
Still gazed as they had gazed before their life had fled.

XIV.

But lo, upon the mother's stagnant breast,
The infant lived, and cried with feeble wail,
And ever and anon her bosom prest,
As wondering why the well-known fount should fail;
And then he looked into her face so pale,
So wan, and pouted out his mouth, and fought
His little fists, and screamed, as if to rail
Upon her heartlessness; but when he caught
Her stiff and icy breasts again he ceased and thought;

XV.

Or haply seemed to think; for then he raised
His head, and looked again into her eyes,
And long, and still, and earnestly he gazed,
As struck by some too hideous surprise,
Or horror of some undefined surmise;
But when he saw that no response would come
To meet his gaze, no voice to soothe his cries,
He shivered through his limbs, and, cold and numb
Sank back with wondering look and eyeballs staring,
dumb.

XVI.

I took him in my arms and said, "Poor child,
There is no food in these dead breasts for thee,
Nor in the breadth of all this desert's wild."
And then he fixed his wondering eyes on me,
As asking whence and why his misery;
I kissed his forehead; peacefully he sighed,
And nestled to my shoulder trustingly;
"I am thy great strong friend," I said, and tried
To save him; but he slowly languished, sank and died.

XVII.

"Now recollection hovers o'er that scene,
For now the case of that poor child is mine;
Like him I wonder what the change has been,
And look into a mother's face to pine
For sympathy, for love, or for some sign
Of life and joy that used to be of old;
But though my pleading voice and tears combine
Their piteous complaint, I but behold
A still and lifeless form, stretched lifeless, stark, and cold.

XVIII.

"The happy summer-time has passed away;
Stern Thought, like Famine, o'er the land has swept,
And robbed the soul from that now lifeless clay;
My hunger-smitten eyes on thee have slept,
And, waking, wondered while on thee they wept;
For all their gaze met with but blank reply,
As through my shuddering soul there slowly crept
The surmise of the awful truth that thy
Great life had fled in death, and I with thee must die.

XIX.

"This is the change that year now adds to year,
That takes the sight from thy once loving eye,
The hearing from thy once all-pitying ear,
And makes thee dumb to my heartrending cry.
Oh, mother, thou art dead, and here I lie
An orphan child upon thy bloodless heart,
No friend to come to help my misery,
Slowly to starve till life and thought depart;—
My blood doth freeze to see what thou hast been, and art.

XX.

"Thus, thus the life that first by Thought was given,
By Thought is murdered in its youthful glow,
And Mystery, that feels all earth and heaven,
Again into the universe doth grow:
Such life it was I saw, and saw it flow
Through all the frame of things in every place,
And now 'tis gone I know not what to know:
Would God that I again, like Israel's race,
Could breathe the life of God through Nature's corpse-like face!"

IV.

I.

"THE day upon the wings of night hath flown.
Oh, silver-sceptred queen, ascending now
The steps of darkness to thy shadowy throne,
The hosts of heaven at thy presence bow,
And all the earth is worshipping below:
'Mid clouds and stars that, moving in thy train,
Or waiting thy advance, thou passest slow,
And all the skies are hushed; the halo rain
Spreads wide around thy path its mist-encircling fane,

II.

"And thou dost move into the moving night,
Attended by those angels of thy will,
Enrobed by mantling clouds of silvery light,
And round thy brow the crown that snows distil.
How peaceful, lovely, lonely, cold, and still!
Resplendent orb,—thou virgin majesty,
That all the overflowing night dost fill
With these thy floods of mellow radiancy,
On, on with stately motion walk the silent sky.

III.

"O Moon, that bendest down thy lofty gaze
Of cold serenity and passionless
Regard, the very beauty of thy rays
Now overfloods my heart with strange distress;
The melancholy of thy peacefulness,
The sweet, sad, holy calm of radiancy
Which seems as if it should, yet does not bless,
The utter dearth of love and sympathy
For things below where thou dost walk so mournfully:

IV.

"All fill my heart with sadness, and my eyes
With tears; and yet I know not why. Thy beams
Arouse in my lone heart some longing sighs
For things, I know not what—some shadowy dream
Of happiness, which in its vagueness seems
A thing that was and is forgotten now—
As when our waking thought, remembering, deems
The visions of the night one raptured glow,
Yet, thinking, cannot tell the scenes they had to show.

V.

"Ah me, the soul of man is as thy light;
When tranquil, all its sweet tranquillity
Is but a mournfulness within the night;
She sheds her beams upon the earth and sky
To find one universal mystery,
And, gazing with a sadness calm and still
Into the depths of black infinity,
A cold despair begins her sight to fill,
And every beam of every other thought to kill.

VI.

"And such despair it is my soul that fills;
'Tis steady, cold, and passionless as thine;
A calm despair, that all to numbness chills:
For since the sun rose o'er horizon's line
Until his place to thee he did resign,
Amid this sea of hills my lonely mind
Hath pondered on the mystery; yet pine
I still for light as I have always pined;
The mystery is rayless, and the mind's eye blind.

VII.

"Oh, what is now my staggering thought to think,
When history doth give uncertain sound,
When generations into silence sink,
And all the ages with recurring round,
The same void orbit in void space have found?
Opinion, thousand-throated, shrieks and moans,
Pale Terror points her finger to the ground,
Grief, Pain, and Sickness, blend their wails and groans,
While Death, with cavern-mouth, is munching flesh and bones.

VIII.

"And Wisdom? She hath now grown old with men.
Hath seen the centuries to come and go,
And pondered all that fell within her ken;
Hath she no voice, no counsel to bestow—
She, from whose youthful lips there used to flow
Such streams of eloquence to men of old?
Yea, still to listening ears her voice can show
The teachings written in the years unrolled;
But now the things she tells are not the things she told.

IX.

"Again let Wisdom to her children cry.
Fear of the Lord was her beginning; then
Were days of joyous life and minstrelsy,
And Youth remembering her Creator, when
The days that had no pleasure in their ken
Had not yet come; but now her golden bowls
And silver cords are broken, and to men
She cries,—'Wait, hope, but see in blind-eyed moles
The type of creeds; in patience ye possess your souls.

X.

"'O thou small creature of a smaller span,
Address thyself to see the things that are;
As man, think not to know why thou art man,
Or what an insect is, or whence a star;
The dim horizons round thee stretch afar
Into a shoreless universe, and there
The only sound responding is the jar
Of elements which rush through earth and air,
To spurn with maniac laughter Reason's piteous prayer.

XI.

"'Address thyself to see the things that are,
And of the things thou seest knowledge reap;
The skies will send no fiery-steeded car
Thine intellect through highest truth to sweep;
Thy knowledge must one widening orbit keep;
She cannot plunge the universe to mete
The depths of the unfathomable deep,
And, as of old, Humanity discreet
Judging asks, What is truth?—and leaves the judgment seat.'

XII.

"O Wisdom, I will be a child of thine,
For thou, at least, dost clearly speak and well;
I cannot to the mystery resign
My aching heart, nor bid my mind to dwell
In peace beneath the shadow of a fell
Dismay; but in the darkness I can wait
Till Death shall move through mystery to tell
The soul-appalling truth he has to state,
Dissolve the doubt, and open fling the doors of fate.

XIII.

"O Death, beneath this lonely moon-lit sky,
The thought of thee lets loose an agony:
Thou mystery within a mystery,
The darkness of the dark infinity
Is darkened darker by thy darkness; thy
Terrific spirit broods upon the deep,
And shades the shadows of uncertainty
Beneath the shadow of thy wings, that sweep
Me to the awful certainty of unknown sleep.

XIV.

"And if for many gloom-encircled years
Those wings of thine find not in me their prey,
What is it but that I shall see the biers
Of all my loved ones sink into the clay?
O God! to think of what the pangs that may
Be mine to feel ere feeling is no more—
Ere these strong limbs grow weak, or this hair grey,
How many times this heart's new opened sore
May bleed, as spears shall pierce where spears have
pierced before!

XV.

"Behold that form beloved, which lying there
Doth breathe away of life the latest moan;
Around the bed the faces of despair,
Upon the bed a face of tortured stone;
The ashy lips which gape, and gasp, and groan;
The eyeballs rolling with a vacant gaze;
The hands which clutch for dread to be alone;
The gurgling shudder; now the eyes which raise
Their lids to stare; then sink in their last filmy glaze.

XVI.

"And then the hush, the solemn hush of death;
The rising heart, the choking sob, the tears,
The chamber where we gaze with bated breath
Upon that steady sleep which yet appears
So lifelike that we almost stay our fears;
But oh, it is the end—the hopeless end—
The utter desolation of the years,
And memory of that still form shall send
Through life a sombre shadow nought in life can rend.

XVII.

"O Death, thou strange mysterious end of all,
The common lot of emperor and slave,
From whose dim land no message, sound, or call,
Returns to answer million hearts that crave
To know the hidden secret of the grave;
A thousand generations passed away,
With all their harvest of the good and brave,
A teeming generation here to-day,
And not one answering whisper each to each can say.

XVIII.

"Within this prison-house of mortal flesh
We outward look with yearning to be free,
Our lungs with heaven's breezes to refresh,
Celestial glory with our eyes to see;
On spirit-wings to climb yon sky to Thee,
O Thou, of Life and Light the Lord and Sun,
There from all darkness doubt and dread to flee,
To feel in Thy great Life our life begun,
And triumph in the joy of endless victory won.

XIX.

"But ah! the pallid horror of that sight,
The dim uncertainty that shrouds the dead,
Which rises like a spectre in the night,
And palsies every faculty with dread;
We shrink into our earthy cave, and sped
Are now all hopes that rising shade before,
As, cowering in fear, we hide the head,
And clutch the clay upon our prison floor,
Lest aught should drag us through yon ready opening door.

XX.

"Thus live we lives in bondage fear of death,
And hug our chains of misery and woe,
Preferring here to draw assuréd breath
To passing into things we do not know;
And yet we feel our lives with ceaseless flow
Do ebb from hearts each measured throb that count,
In vain we strive to think the course is slow,
Or think to think not on the emptying fount;
The terror deepens as our thoughts on thoughts amount.

XXI.

"To sever all the ties of love and life,
To look with human eyes into the deep,
To feel the wrench of nature's parting strife,
And then into that awful gulf to leap;
Shall it be there an all-eternal sleep—
A silent nothingness—a blank—the end?
Or may we hope through that last act to keep
Some trembling thought, some life which yet may blend
With memories that o'er new life a halo lend?

XXII.

"The question echoes through life's vista'd days,
And no voice answers to our list'ning dread;
Again the horrors of the silence raise
The dim uncertainty that shrouds the dead
All poet, saint, or sage have ever said
Before that spectre vanish like a cloud;
We all are men, and they have forwards fled
Into the darkness—wrapped within that shroud;
And yet their silence reigns whose speech was once so loud.

XXIII.

" And one there was I knew, most near and dear,
The brightest jewel of a family chain,
Whose memory now calls the starting tear,
Responsive to the music of her name,—
Laonda, angel-sister, see the same
Fond brother thou in thy fond life didst know ;
Behold these bitter often tears, which rain
As they have rained through many days of woe,
Since thou, Laonda, left me—left me long ago.

XXIV.

" O lovely, loving, and beloved, how can
The glory of thine image ever fade ?
I see thee now, as now my thoughts o'erspan
The gulf of years since we thy form low laid ;
I see thee now, as then, all perfect—made
By Nature as her type of maidenhood,
More beautiful, more sweet than has been said
By any poet in his highest mood,
Or could be said in words that should be understood

XXV.

"I see thy stature flowing in its grace
Of easy movement, natural and free,
The all magnificence of that calm face
Enframed by locks which rippling kiss the knee,
The splendour of those eyes which seem to see
Into the inmost depth of things, and light
With flames of genius as they move to be
Upturned in song, or throw their beauteous sight
Or new reflections of that genius, burning bright.

XXVI.

"The changing years of change which come and go
Yet leave that image still unchanged for me,
And through all turmoil since of world and woe,
'Tis sweet to think I am unchanged to thee;
But when, as now, that lovely form I see,
What sword is it that makes my heart its goal?
What raises this vast rush of agony,
Whose waves and billows all tumultuous roll
Upon this shattered thought—this shipwreck of the soul?

XXVII.

"'Tis not the loss of that great beauty rare,
'Tis not the loss of those high gifts, although
That beauty might not yet have grown less fair,
Nor those high gifts have lost their youthful glow:
If still thou knowest aught, thou well dost know,
Laonda, that 'tis deeper far than this
The source of all these billows' rolling flow;
Thou knewest in that latest look of bliss
How well I knew the meaning of our latest kiss:

XXVIII.

"It meant farewell; but can I say what more?
Surely this mind should reel from reason's height,
This struggling heart lay bare its riven core;
It meant that thou didst give thy young, thy bright,
Thy joyous life for mine; and by the light
Of dying love in those large eyes, 'twas said
'Twas given cheerfully; that dimming sight
Spake plainly as I kissed thy glorious head,
'For thee I gladly die—think this when I am dead.'

XXIX.

"And shall I never see that face again,
Exchange one look with those grand eyes of thine,
To tell thee all the floods of grief and pain
Which left these furrowed features for their sign?
O how would then thy great gaze bend on mine
With all that noble tenderness of yore,
Thy soul of pity stamped in every line,
Thy depth of earnest love in boundless store,
To look on me again as it has looked before.

XXX.

"No more: Laonda, thou are lost to me;
Our deepest sorrows show us least of hope;
O Death, thou once appalling enemy,
Befriend a life which knows of life the scope.
I seek not more the mystery to grope;
Mine eyes have seen salvation; thou art kind;
Now let thy shadow through the valley slope,
And fling oblivion o'er this darkened mind;
I wait with one last pang, thy last long rest to find.

XXXI.

"Into that valley dark I shall descend,
Without a shepherd and without a guide,
With voice which cries in anguish for a friend,
And hands which feel for help on any side,
But feel to find both rod and staff denied;
With trembling steps I downwards move to fall
Into the deep that depths of blackness hide—
Upcast a glance within the dark'ning pall,
To take one parting look on light, on life, on all.

XXXII.

"I see the forms of those I fondly love,
With tender anguish in their flowing eyes,
Look down on me from tall stern heights above,
Those heights to which I never more shall rise;
I hear their choking sobs, their smothered sighs,
And try to answer with a long farewell;
But in the darkness, voice to whisper dies—
Yet still adieu, adieu—yes, eyes can tell
The floods of feeling that in heart's last throb may swell.

XXXIII.

"Adieu, adieu, the darkness thick'ning now
Shuts out your tearful faces from my sight;
I feel the sweat of death upon my brow,
And all my soul is wrapped in endless night.
Help me at last with but one ray of light:
I am alone in my last agony;
Alone! Oh Lord of mercy and of might,
Hast Thou no ear to hear, no eye to see?
My God, my God!—why hast Thou forsaken me?"

V.

I.

As thus I cried I sank upon the ground,
And slept, or swooned, I know not how or why;
But while I lay I heard a mighty sound,
As of an avalanche amid the sky,
And looking up astonished saw on high
A glory opening wide the doors of night;
It streamed, like one great road of radiancy,
From one sky-chasm, where, in a lake of light,
An angel stood—stood like a pillar, dazzling bright.

II.

In stature as a man colossal, white
His raiment as the glistening mountain snow,
The glory from his form and face streamed bright
And mellow as the sun's full rays, when low
'Mid evening skies their splendours overflow;
His features, like a living statue, wore
A look of thoughtfulness, which seemed to grow
More grave as his deep eyes serenely bore
On me a steady gaze that power seemed to pour.

III.

Upon his arm he held an open book,
And on the page he pointed with his hand,
While to my face he turned a meaning look,
Which seemed like half entreaty, half command;
And when I turned mine eyes to understand
The writing unto which their sight he drew,
One word alone burned like a flaming brand,
And this one word was writ in letters two,
Which, as I read, I saw to be thus written,—"Do."

IV.

When I had read, the vision passed away,
Slowly dissolving into midnight sky,
And on the ground still in my trance I lay;
Nor did I rouse till Morning splendidly
Began to tinge the eastern hills, and fly
Her golden heralds on their wings of light
Among the wakened clouds; each twinkling eye
The stars closed one by one, as though their sight,
Were dazzled by the sun, who, breaking through the night,

v.

Now showed his crescent forehead to the world;
With slow advance above horizon's brim
His fiery eyeballs gleamed through darkness, furled
As curtains o'er the sky; the shadows dim
Of dimly lighted shades, with hurried skim,
Swept flying in confusion through the air;
The morning mists, unwreathing round the rim
Of mountain's brow, up-curled in mists from where
The sparkling dews drenched all the mountain's heathy hair.

vi.

And as I watched the birth of new-born day,
I mused upon the vision of the night;
Was it a dream? or had it aught to say
From some true angel of the realms of light?
The meaning of the word that shone so bright
I could not understand, and so methought,
"If 'twere an angel that the word did write,
It is a useless word to me, untaught
The meaning mystical with which it may be fraught."

VII.

While thus I mused, I saw upon the heath
A man approaching clad in monkish dress,
And when we met, "Why here," he said, "beneath
The dawn art thou so far from men? what stress
Of spirit drives thee to the loneliness
Of this high mountain waste? is it for prayer
Or penitence? if so, my son, I bless
Thee in the name of Him who did repair
To deserts fasting, for temptation to prepare."

VIII.

And then I told him of my case the whole,
My musings, vision, and perplexity;
For this old friar seemed to stir my soul
With longings to outpour my misery
Into a heart which breathed in sympathy.
And when I told him that I had awoke
To wonder why the angel came to me,
—If 'twere an angel that the midnight broke—
He fixed a solemn gaze on me, and thus he spoke:

IX.

"The meaning of the vision is, my son,
That all thy thought is barren as these hills;
Its rising structures can support but one
Great wilderness, where chilly fog distils;
It grows no balm to help our human ills,
No corn nor grapes to yield us bread and wine;
Its only fruits are those whose poison kills
The souls that for the Bread of Heaven pine,
And all is lonely, bleak, and desolate,—a sign

X.

"Of that which God has cursed; therefore, my son,
The vision of the night did come to thee,
As, brooding,—seeking rest and finding none—
Thy wearied spirit knew not where to flee,
And sank at last in hopeless agony;
That thought-bred eagle, Doubt, had struck thy mind,
And would have torn its life of sanctity—
Devouring all the flesh and blood, to find
A skeleton of hopes, like crumbling bones, behind—

XI.

"Had not this vision timely come to say
That all the world is not as this lone, drear,
And barren wilderness; down far away
In yonder plains there is another sphere,
Where 'mid the hum of voices we may hear
The cry of pain which we may help, and view
The sorrow with which we may blend a tear,
The dying face whence we may wipe the dew;
And therefore said the angel-book that one word,—'Do.'

XII.

"And what, O man, canst thou do here alone
Within the wilderness of thine own thought?
Thou sayest that the life of prayer is gone,
Then why seek solitude where there is nought
For thee to worship? meditation fraught
With meditation's self alone doth feed
Upon that self: the bread of hope she sought
Being denied, in her sore craving need
She sucks her own life's blood to satisfy her greed.

XIII.

"And this is what thy wretched soul did find,
What time she hungered in the tangled net
Of thine own weaving; mind did feed on mind;
Therefore the vision came, at last, to let
Thee know there is a way that may be yet
More excellent than thinking honestly,—
More excellent than faith or hope to get
The blessing that thy soul may satisfy,—
It is the way of God—the way of charity."

XIV.

Then I: "O monk, thou speakest as thy kind;
Thou hast no reverence for intellect,
Or for the splendid conquests of the mind;
Thou see'st in them but that which doth reject
Thy creed incredible; but I reflect
These are the forces that must rule the world
To them Belief now pays a new respect,
For under them her flag is now unfurled,
And if they cast her out, she is to ruin hurled.

XV.

" Tis true that in the past Belief held sway,
Within the night of ignorant repose,
O'er generations which have passed away,
Ere yet the empire of our Reason rose;
But now she must all sway and power lose,
If she bow not before the majesty
Of Thought enthroned supreme above his foes:
No longer queen of all humanity,
She is to Thought enslaved, and must obey, or die.

XVI.

" So now, O monk, in Thought behold a king,
The sceptre of whose kingdom is a right
Sceptre, whose crown is Truth, whose rule doth bring
The blessing of new knowledge to our sight,
And sheds these blessings far and free as light;
Whose throne doth rest on Wisdom's pedestal,
Whose armies hurl the thunders of their might
On Falsehood's fortresses, and towered wall
Of Superstition's stronghold, rocking to its fall.

XVII.

"But Faith, while she held power over men,
Did use it with the grip of tyranny,
Murdering Reason as a traitor when
He groaned beneath the burden of a lie,
Shaking her bloody sword before the eye
Of Freedom, burning Knowledge not to tell
The truth that she would brand as heresy,
And, spreading fire and slaughter far and fell,
Screamed to a trembling world the awful doom of hell."

XVIII.

He answered: "I spoke not of my belief;
Had I thought fit I could have spoken much
Of that which turns to joy my every grief,
Which saves me from the all remorseless clutch
Of iron despair, which fills my life with such
A burning radiancy of happiness,
That yonder sun, whose rising beams now touch
The hills with burning flame, is less,—far less
A thing to bless this world, than is my faith to bless

XIX.

"A life which else were conscious death—a hell
Where in the darkness of eternal night,
'Mid stony wastes where life did never dwell,
My mind should wander in the gleaming light
Of human knowledge, nebulous; my sight
For ever closed in blindness, and my ears
Appalled by silence in her mindless might,
My soul a solitary heap of fears—
A thinking chaos in the chaos of the spheres.

XX.

"But, as I said, I spoke not of my creed;
The vision that appeared to thee said not
'Believe'; but 'Do'; and in this word I read
That blessed faith is not to be thy lot,
But only the salvation to be got
By charity—salvation from the hell
Of Thought's consuming fire; and therefore what
The vision taught thee I was sent to tell,
And now, my son, adjure thee to obey. Farewell."

XXI.

I watched him pass beyond my sight, and thought—
"Have I done well to let him go from me?
Perchance he had some truth he might have taught
For though I spoke in my sincerity
When I upbraided creed as tyranny,
I felt his words held much of truth, although
They told of thought as barren misery;
Perchance our minds, by mingling thoughts, might now
Have bred fresh shoots of thought which on my mind might grow

XXII.

"To yield a brighter blossom, and a fruit
More profitable, than the barren thorn
Which in my lonely heart has struck its root."
And thus upon that autumn's early morn
I walked alone over the mountain's horn,
And then descended to the distant glade,
Where barren heath passed into waving corn;
And loamy fields, which told of plough and spade,
Were dotted here and there with cottages. I made

XXIII.

My way to one small home 'midst gardens bright
With flowers; like a little gem 'twas set
Upon the mountain's rugged foot; the white
And smiling walls held roses in a net
Of creeping plants, their fragrant bunches wet
With morning dews. And then my troubled mind
Bethought—"Ah, would that I could here forget
The wilderness which I have left behind—
This is a simple home of happiness enshrined."

XXIV.

But, as I passed the door, I heard a wail
And moaning as of pain; I stood and knocked.
The door was opened by a woman pale,
Within whose tearful face were plainly locked
The sorrow and the grief which now had stocked
A heart long emptied of its youth and joy.
She said—"O, God be thanked, who has not mocked
My prayers: thou art His servant to employ
His ways the shafts of the destroyer to destroy.

XXV.

"My child, she shall not die; she shall not die;
O say she shall not die: through night and day
I have besought my God to hear my cry,
And now thou comest from the mountain's way
To answer, like Elijah, when I pray:
Thou art His messenger; O say thou art:
She shall not die, she shall not die, O say
She shall not die; come in, come in, my heart
Tells me she shall not die; O come in and impart

XXVI.

"The blessing thou art sent to give; come, come."
And in her frantic grief she clutched my arm,
To draw me through the doorway, as if some
Strong tumult of long hope and wild alarm
Had raised a mania in her mother's warm
Fond breast, and made her eyes, all bright with fear,
To wander quickly, as in dread of harm
From every side; and thus she drew me near
An inner door and said,—"O save her, she is here."

XXVII.

When I went in I saw a piteous sight;
A lovely maiden lay on her death-bed;
For, though she lived, I saw the dreadful light
Within her face that death may sometimes shed
Before his shadow falls. From her young head
Long golden tresses, bright and soft as floss,
In flowing streams luxuriantly spread,
And seemed to brighten with their living gloss
The snow-white linen which their ripples waved across

XXVIII.

Her large, wide, round, and childish-wondering eyes
Resembled those clear sapphire stones, whose hue
Is delicately pure as summer skies,
Although the liquid softness of their blue
Was more like sapphire melted, with a new
Translucency and tenderness of glow,
As when, dissolved by summer's breath, the dew,
Uncrystallised afresh from parent snow,
The warmer beauty of a fluid life doth show.

XXIX.

The face was like a picture, passing fair,
And held such heavenly light of purity,
That, as she lay amid her golden hair,
It might be thought an angel from the sky
Had come to show our hearts the radiancy
Of holiness; I stood before the sight
Amazed, until the tears bedimmed mine eye;
"This maiden, pure and beautiful as light,
Is she to pass into the nothingness of night?

XXX.

"O why, if Nature made a thing so fair,
So lovely in its morning's golden rise,
Should she eclipse its beauty by despair,
And wipe its splendour out before our eyes?
Is there no power in the earth or skies
That here can help to save this glorious child?
Or must she pass away upon the sighs
Of autumn winds that moan upon the wild—
The beautiful, the pure, the innocently mild!"

XXXI.

"Evangeline, my child," the mother said,
"This is a stranger who has come to save;
He has been sent by God; I prayed and prayed
For help, and it has come; O sir, the grave
Has swallowed up my husband, and my brave
Young Roland,—surely God will help me now;
Say thou canst save my child, for O, I crave
My God this time some pity to bestow;
It is the last, the last of all I have below."

XXXII.

And then the maiden spake with sweet, low voice,
"Oh, mother, rave not wildly thus; I know
That I must die, and if I had my choice,
You know I would not stay,—I want to go
And be with Jesus; mother dear, although
'Tis hard to part, we soon shall meet again
Where father is and Roland too; and oh!
How joyful it will be to meet where pain
And sorrow shall have ceased, and all your tears that rain

XXXIII.

"So fast shall be for ever wiped away."
"My child, my child, my darling child, O speak
Not so,—look not at me in that strange way—
You must not die—O God, my heart will break—
Kind sir, tell her that God will not yet take
Her from me; Oh, she is my last, my best,
My only child—she must not die—'twill make
Me mad—'twill drive me to my grave—'twill wrest
My shattered soul from this my old, my widowed breast."

XXXIV.

And then she fell upon her daughter's bed,
Convulsed with desperate weeping; but the maid,
Still calm, looked straight at me: "When I am dead,
Will you console my mother's grief?" she said,
"And see she does not want; I am afraid
That she may want for much when I am gone;
There is no one in all this mountain glade
Who will take care of her as I have done;
Oh, sir, when I am dead she will be left alone."

XXXV.

When I had said I would make it my care
That her lone mother should not want for bread,
She answered, "God be praised who heard my prayer!
O sir, you have removed a weight of lead
From off my heart; for now that you have said
She shall not want, there is not anything
To make me sad, or give me pain or dread—
God bless you, sir.—Oh, Death, where is thy sting
Oh Grave, where is thy victory? My heart doth sing?

XXXVI.

"For joy." She paused a space, then said, "Pray read
To me; 'twill be the last time ere I die:
My mother is too blind, and oh, indeed,
I do so long to hear, as death draws nigh,
Once more my Saviour's voice; read that loud cry
He cried to us, 'Come unto Me all ye
That labour and are heavy laden, I
Will give you rest.' He will give rest to me,
For I have long been weary—laden heavily

XXXVII

"With pain and sickness, and I long to be
At rest." And when such places I had read,
She seemed to rise into an ecstasy:
"I come, I come! O God, I come!" she said,
"The everlasting arms at last are spread
To welcome me: all glory be to Thee,
O Christ—Thou, Thou hast risen from the dead—
Hast conquered Death, and captive led Captivity;

XXXVIII.

"Receive my spirit now that comes to Thee
With shield of Faith and with the Spirit's sword,
For more than conqueror, triumphantly
It comes. Now lettest Thou Thy servant, Lord,
Depart in peace according to Thy word,
For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation; I
Am Thine, and Thou art mine; amid the ford
Of Death's dark waters, Thou art with me, Thy
Strong help is near. O mother, it is sweet to die.

XXXIX.

"Dear mother do not weep, but think when I
Am gone that I am with the angels bright,
And with my Saviour. Mother, I will try
To come again and see you day and night,
And though I may appear not to your sight,
Yet think that I am never far away,
Unless amid the glory of the light
Shed by the Lamb in everlasting day:
And you will follow me; dear mother, watch and pray."

XL.

The widow sobbed, "Oh, mercy, mercy, child!
I cannot, oh, I cannot, cannot part."
And as she cried aloud in sorrow wild,
Her child said faintly, "Mother, my poor heart
Will soon be still: I feel its life blood start
And stand; speak to me before I die;
Say that you will try—try to bear the smart;
It is the last time you will have to try,
And if you can, I shall die, oh, so happily."

XLI.

I took the widow by the arms and said,
"Cease, speak, the time is short." She ceased and gazed
A moment on her dying child, then laid
Her hand upon the maiden's head, and raised
Her eyes, which with a sudden calmness glazed;
Her face was still and white; the words came slow—
"Thy will be done." "My God, Thy name be praised,"
The maiden whispered, "for that Thou dost show
Thy mercy to the widow and the childless. Now

XLII.

"O Father, into Thy hands I commit
My spirit." Then a smile moved o'er her face,
That seemed by sight of angels to be lit,
While slowly she spread out her arms in space,
As if to meet some coming form's embrace;

And then across her face a shadow passed;
The head sank down among its golden lace,
The arms fell gently, and the eyes stood fast;
Her bosom heaved with one long sigh: it was the last.

XLIII.

The widow gazed upon her lifeless child
Almost as calm as was the lovely dead:
As winter's frost doth fix the turmoil wild
Of waters into ice, so now her dread
And tumult froze in steady grief. The red
Sun sank; I left beneath a star-lit sky,
And then—"'Tis true! while tending at that bed
I neither thought upon the mystery,
Nor felt how difficult a thing it is to die."

THE END.

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